

SPEAKERS

INTRODUCTION

You can do a lot of exciting things with a PC, from watching videos and TV to playing games and music. None of these will be much fun without some decent speakers, though. The tiny speakers built into a notebook or display might suffice for occasional Windows bleeps, but they'll suck the joy from your favourite DVDs and music, and they're no good for playing surround-sound audio.

Fortunately, it needn't cost much to add high-quality speakers to your PC. We've tested speaker sets that cost as little as £9, and one of our favourite sets will set you back just £27. You can even upgrade to six-channel surround sound for less than £30. If you do want to spend more, we've tested top-end speaker sets that should impress you, if not your neighbours, with brain-shaking levels of roomy, controlled bass and sparkling treble.

Whatever you want to listen to, and whatever your budget, we'll help you select the perfect speaker set.

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SOUND INVESTMENTS

The right speakers will bring all your games, music and films to life, but do you want to pump up the volume or create a more ambient dynamic? To help you decide, we've reviewed 18 stereo and surround-sound sets

Choosing... Speakers

Before buying a set of speakers, you need to decide whether you want a stereo or surround-sound set. Surround speaker systems add another dimension to DVD and 3D game soundtracks, immersing you in the centre of the action. Surround sound can be fun for music playback, too. There's very little music that's mixed in surround sound, but stereo music can still sound more exciting when it's coming at you from all directions, with the sound filling the room rather than just emanating from the PC.

The downside of surround sound is clutter. Finding the space to mount five satellite speakers and run cables to them all can be tricky, especially when doors get in the way. This is the main reason why, for most people, stereo sets are more appealing. If you're keen to avoid clutter, consider a 2.0 speaker system. These don't include a subwoofer, leaving the two desktop speakers to cover the entire frequency range. However, this often results in a lack of bass.

WIRED FOR SOUND

The ergonomics of the systems reviewed here vary greatly. The best systems in this respect integrate their

controls, a headphone socket and perhaps an auxiliary input for connecting an MP3 player into one of the satellite speakers or a wired remote control that sits on the desktop. Others use controls mounted on the subwoofer, which can be hard to reach if you keep it under the desk.

Another common problem is captive, non-replaceable cables that are too short. You might be able to butcher the supplied cables and splice in some extra wire, but the best systems provide long cables that can be easily replaced if you want to set them up in a particularly large room.

LOUD AND CLEAR

Of course, the most important consideration is sound quality. It's impossible to judge how good a speaker set will sound without actually listening to it, so we tested each one with a range of test tones, to check for gaps in the frequency response, and music tracks from different genres. We also checked each one to see how loud it could play before distortion became evident. Our reviews explain which will immerse you in beautiful sound, and which are just a headache.

STEREO SPEAKERS

ALTEC LANSING
FX4021

★★★★★

£81 inc VAT



The FX4021's design reminded us of 1930s architecture and makes a pleasant change from trendy designs that are liable to date quickly.

The satellite speakers have metal bases that can be replaced with the supplied brackets for wall mounting. The bulky wired remote and cheap-looking infrared remote let the overall appearance down slightly, but having both treble and bass controls close to hand is a rare luxury on PC speakers. A loudness button gives a subtle lift to music, while the SFX button widens the stereo image and doesn't seriously compromise audio quality.

In music tests, it was tough to choose between this set and Bose's Companion 3, but more often than not the FX4021 set came out top. If you don't want surround sound but you demand exceptional sound quality, this is the set to go for. If you want both, the FX5051 are the same speakers in a 5.1 configuration that cost £131 including VAT.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.1, 46W power, 2x 3.5mm stereo inputs

PART CODE 021986942726

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com

DETAILS www.alteclansing.co.uk

- ✓ Great sound quality
- ✗ Bulky subwoofer

BOSE
Companion
2 Mk II

★★★★★

£100 inc VAT

Bose's Companion 2's simple design will blend into a room rather than make a statement. The right speaker houses two pairs of phono inputs, a headphone socket and amplification for both speakers. A volume button is the only control, and with no power switch you'll need to switch off at the wall to avoid wasting electricity.

The lack of a subwoofer cuts down on clutter, but the bulky external power adaptor diminishes this benefit a little. Despite the absence of a subwoofer, the Companion 2 produced deeper bass than many of the budget subwoofer systems. It wasn't obviously lacking except when playing dance tracks with deep basslines. Higher up the frequency spectrum, sounds were smooth and detailed if a little heavy on high treble. The top volume was impressive for such a compact set, and built-in compression avoids distortion at high levels.

This is the best sounding 2.0 set here, but it is very expensive.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.0, unstated power, 2x stereo phono inputs

PART CODE BOS19315

SUPPLIER www.microanvika.com

DETAILS www.bose.co.uk

- ✓ Classy sound in a compact package
- ✗ Similarly priced 2.1 systems give more bass

BOSE
Companion 3
Mk II

★★★★★

£199 inc VAT

This is the most expensive speaker set in the group and it certainly looks the part, right down to the elegant shuttle wheel-style volume knob.

The satellites are compact, but the shape of the subwoofer means it takes up a lot of space. A headphone socket and auxiliary input are built into the controller, but the bass control is located on the back of the subwoofer.

This set produced exceptionally clean and controlled sound. It excelled at reproducing deep bass at high volumes, but very high frequencies weren't as detailed as those from Altec Lansing's more affordable FX4021 set. The Companion 3 sounded better when listening to more laid-back music, but the FX4021, with its more spacious top-end, was more flattering for rock, pop and dance music.

This is a very good set of stereo speakers, but we recommend Altec Lansing's similarly excellent and cheaper set.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.1, unstated power, 2x 3.5mm stereo inputs

PART CODE 83870584

SUPPLIER www.johnlewis.com

DETAILS www.bose.co.uk

- ✓ Detailed, accurate sounds
- ✗ Very expensive

CREATIVE
I-Trigue 3220

★★

£38 inc VAT

The I-Trigue 3220's satellite speakers look good, but they are top-heavy and prone to falling over. The wired remote looks drab in comparison. Its volume and bass controls are recessed wheels, so the levels are hard to see at a glance. The volume control doubles as a power switch, so you shouldn't get any accidental bursts of high volumes when switching on. The subwoofer's tall design means it doesn't take up much space.

The sound quality produced by this set was no better than the more affordable Trust and Genius sets and not a patch on Logitech's X-230 set. Bass frequencies were uneven in our sine tone tests and sounded vague and distant in music tests. The satellites were lacking in very high frequencies and sounded congested and muddled. Music lacked the sense of space suggested by better systems and became muddier as we increased the volume.

Ultimately, this set looks a lot better than it sounds.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.1, 39W power, 3.5mm stereo inputs

PART CODE 51MF0300AA001

SUPPLIER www.dolphinmusic.co.uk

DETAILS <http://uk.europe.creative.com>

- ✓ Attractive satellite speaker design
- ✗ Limp sound quality

CYBER ACOUSTICS
CA-2014

★

£9 inc VAT

Cyber Acoustics' CA-2014 is one of the most affordable speaker sets. Unfortunately, it's also one of the worst sounding.

Bass is non-existent; we didn't hear a peep in our 20-100Hz sine test tones. High treble is pretty much non-existent too, leaving a thin, claustrophobic noise in the middle of the spectrum that's more akin to the speakers you find built into a notebook or monitor. The frequencies it does reproduce sound muddy, imprecise and generally unflattering to music sources. There are no tone controls, but with sound quality so basic there's not much hope of salvaging anything anyway.

Even if you want speakers to play for the occasional Windows noise, the CA-2014 set is a poor choice. The cable between the two speakers, the one that connects to the PC, and the power cable are all far too short and can't be replaced. If you keep your PC under your desk, it's likely that you just won't be able to plug in these speakers.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.0, 1.5W power, 3.5mm stereo inputs

PART CODE CA2014

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

DETAILS www.cyberacoustics.com

- ✓ Very low price
- ✗ Terrible sound quality; awkward cables

CYBER ACOUSTICS
CA-3550

★

£38 inc VAT

We don't share Cyber Acoustics' love for blue neon lights, but those who add cold cathode lamps to their PCs may feel differently. The CA-3550's controls are easily accessible, with power, volume and subwoofer level on the right satellite and a headphone socket just behind the speaker fascia. The satellites have been designed to look flat, but the bulky base contains the speaker cone.

The big subwoofer houses a meaty 7.5in speaker, but it failed to produce loud or deep bass. In fact, our sine tone tests revealed nasty distortions at sub-bass frequencies that coloured higher-frequency sounds. The satellite speakers aren't much better. The overall tone was a surreal, swirly mess, with a congested mid-range and little detail or sense of space.

Comparative tests can be unforgiving, but even when heard in isolation the CA-3550 set sounds decidedly unpleasant. With a price that's not exactly cheap, these are a particularly poor choice.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.1, 32W power, 3.5mm stereo inputs

PART CODE CA3550

SUPPLIER www.scan.co.uk

DETAILS www.cyberacoustics.com

- ✓ Well-placed controls
- ✗ Unpleasant sound quality



CYBER ACOUSTICS CA-3001

★★★

£16 inc VAT

Cyber Acoustics' CA-3001 is the most compact and affordable 2.1 speaker system we have seen. Its design is so plain that it's impossible to take any delight or offence in it. All the cables connect to the right satellite rather than the subwoofer, which leaves a mess of wires on your desk, but the captive cables are long.

Considering the CA-3001's size and price, it's hardly surprising they sound dire. Lower frequencies sounded like they were emanating from a cereal box and the top end was scruffy and vague. Deep synthesiser basses were so distorted they sounded as if they had been recorded on the kazoo. There are no tone controls, but with the sound quality pretty much beyond salvation we're not sure they'd have been anything other than frustrating.

If Logitech's £28 X-230 set is beyond your budget, we recommend Genius's SP-E350 set. It can at least reproduce the frequencies it's capable of with some degree of accuracy.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.1, 5W power, 3.5mm stereo inputs
PART CODE CA3001

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk
DETAILS www.cyberacoustics.com

- ✓ Very cheap for a 2.1 set
- ✗ Disastrous sound quality, no headphone output



GENIUS SP-E350

★★★

£12 inc VAT

Genius's SP-E350 set is an uncommonly ugly system. The knob marked Tone is essentially a treble control. It seems unusual not to have a bass control, too, but it's better than nothing, which is what the other 2.0 systems provide. A 3D button widens the stereo image, but while this has a dramatic effect, not least on the volume level, the result isn't obviously better than with it switched off. We like the trio of minijack sockets along the front for connecting a portable player, headphones and a microphone. However, the colour-coded sockets do nothing for the system's looks.

The sound is fairly light on bass, but thanks to the larger cabinet design it's nowhere near as weak as the Trust and Cyber Acoustics 2.0 systems. The tone is fairly forward-sounding with accentuated upper mid-range frequencies, but is much cleaner and more pleasant than any of the other systems below £20.

This set isn't great, but it's acceptably good.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.0, 10W power, 3.5mm stereo cable inputs
PART CODE SPGEN-SP-E350

SUPPLIER www.pc-itsolutions.co.uk
DETAILS www.geniusnet.com

- ✓ Acceptable sound quality for the price
- ✗ Ugly as sin



GENIUS SW-Flat2.1 850

★★★

£22 inc VAT

Genius's flat satellite design scheme ticks all the right boxes for style, but still manages to look tacky. The controls, headphone socket and auxiliary input are mounted on the subwoofer, which will be inconvenient if you keep it under your desk. The satellite speakers have short cables, though, so you'll probably need to keep the subwoofer on top of your work space.

Our sine tone tests revealed distortions when reproducing very deep bass, but the set managed to pull itself together by about 60Hz. This means bass-heavy dance music and DVD sound effects sound poor, but music without deep bass escapes relatively unscathed. The satellite speakers produced an airy tone with crisp high frequencies, but lower mid-range frequencies were a little thin. In some tests, the sound quality wasn't far behind the X-230 set, but in others it was notably inferior.

The price is low, but it's worth spending an extra couple of pounds for Logitech's speakers.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.1, 20W power, 2x 3.5mm stereo inputs
PART CODE 31730349100

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk
DETAILS www.geniusnet.com

- ✓ Crisp high frequencies
- ✗ Inconvenient controls; distorted bass



LOGITECH X-230

★★★★★

£27 inc VAT

BUDGET BUY Logitech's X-230 set has been our favourite stereo speaker system since our Labs round-up in *Shopper* April 2006, so we were interested to see how it would compete against the current competition.

It quickly became apparent that there's still nothing to touch it at this price. Music sounded clearer, richer and more balanced than any other system under £50; we had to compare it to Altec Lansing's £81 FX4021 to identify any faults. This revealed slightly muddled higher frequencies, but the differences were subtle.

All the cables except power protrude from the right satellite, which creates more desktop clutter than if the connections are on the subwoofer. The audio input is on a captive cable rather than a socket, which means you can't replace it. Still, this is unlikely to pose a problem for most people.

With impressive sound quality at a remarkably low price, it's unfair to award the X-230 set anything less than full marks.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.1, 32W power, 3.5mm stereo cable inputs
PART CODE 970123-1120

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.logitech.com

- ✓ Excellent sound quality
- ✗ Cabling is awkward



TRUST SP-2650D

★★★

£15 inc VAT

Trust's SP-2650D set uses the same speaker design as the SP-3800D set, but it doesn't include a subwoofer. This is a bad idea as, without a dedicated bass speaker, they struggle to reproduce lower-mid frequencies and don't have any hope of producing bass.

Bizarrely, Trust seems to have tuned the 2650D's response to accentuate high rather than lower frequencies, resulting in a scratchy and harsh sound. There's a reasonable amount of clarity and detail, but we found it impossible to become accustomed to the complete lack of low frequencies. Turning up the volume beyond polite listening levels quickly replaced any sense of clarity with gurgling distortion.

The 140cm captive input cable might not reach under a desk, so you may need an extension cable to connect this set to your PC.

This inexpensive set will suffice for Windows alert sounds, but anyone who wants to play music, watch videos or play games should look elsewhere.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.0, 8W power, 3.5mm stereo cable inputs
PART CODE 14924

SUPPLIER www.7dayshop.com
DETAILS www.trust.com

- ✓ Detailed high frequencies
- ✗ No bass whatsoever



TRUST SP-3800D

★★★

£28 inc VAT

The SP-3800D's satellites' plastic design looks cheap, but there is an option to mount them on the wall.

The accompanying subwoofer is fairly compact and houses all the connections and a bass control, while the volume knob and auxiliary input are mounted on the right satellite speaker. There's no headphone output, though. If you want to use headphones, you'll need to unplug the speakers from the back of your PC or buy a separate audio switching box.

Upper mid-range frequencies are bright and detailed, but lower-mid and very high frequencies are weak, so the sound lacks warmth. The subwoofer doesn't go very deep, leaving bass sounds that are thin but not as distorted as those from some other low-cost systems. Considering these faults, the 3800D's overall sound quality was surprisingly good, although we needed to turn them up quite loud before they performed at their best.

This set is acceptable, but Logitech's X-230 set is cheaper and sounds better.

STEREO SPEAKERS 2.1, 45W power, 3.5mm stereo, stereo phono inputs
PART CODE 14928

SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.co.uk
DETAILS www.trust.com

- ✓ Reasonable sound quality
- ✗ No headphone output



SURROUND-SOUND SPEAKERS

CREATIVE GigaWorks G550W

★★★★★
£196 inc VAT



Creative's GigaWorks G550W set stands out thanks to its massive subwoofer, equally huge 310W power rating and wireless rear speakers. The wired remote control beams a signal to a separate rear amplifier for the rear pair of speakers. You'll still need wires between this amp, the mains and the two rear satellites, but you won't need cables across the room.

At polite listening levels, the G550W set sounds good, with little to separate it from Logitech's X-540. As we cranked up the volume, though, the G550W really showed its worth, producing a detailed sound with loads of bass that none of the other sets could match.

If you like your DVDs or games to be loud, the G550W is more than up to the task. The wireless rear speaker system works well, too, but not everyone will need it. If you can live without it, Creative's GigaWorks G500 (*Labs, Shopper* April 2006) is the same system with conventional wiring and costs £145 inc VAT.

SURROUND SPEAKERS 5.1, 310W power, 3x stereo phono (5.1) inputs

PART CODE 51MF4080AA003

SUPPLIER www.dolphinmusic.co.uk

DETAILS <http://uk.europe.creative.com>

- ✓ Sounds fantastic at high volumes
- ✗ Unexceptional at lower volumes

CREATIVE Inspire T6100

★★★
£35 inc VAT



Creative's Inspire T6100 is remarkably affordable for a surround-sound speaker set from a well-known brand. A volume control and headphone output are integrated into the right satellite speaker, and there's a bass control on the subwoofer. The line inputs are on a captive cable, but it's connected to the subwoofer so shouldn't cause any problems reaching your PC.

Unfortunately, the sound quality is poorer than most of the surround-sound systems. There's plenty of bass, but it sounds fuzzy and doesn't blend well with the output from the satellites. The satellites aren't much better, with a lack of high-frequency sparkle and congested mid-range frequencies. We found that increasing the treble in our sound card's control panel helped a little.

This set doesn't sound great, but it's better than the cheaper Trust SP-6250Z speakers. If Logitech's X-540 system is too expensive for you, this is a reasonable alternative.

SURROUND SPEAKERS 5.1, 52W power, 3x 3.5mm stereo (5.1) inputs

PART CODE 51MF4085AA001

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk

DETAILS <http://uk.europe.creative.com>

- ✓ Inexpensive
- ✗ Uninspiring sound quality

GENIUS SW-HF5.1 1200

★★★
£36 inc VAT



Genius's SW-HF5.1 1200 set is made from maple veneer, but its garish silver grilles spoil the effect. All the controls are located on the front of the subwoofer, so they're awkward to access if it's kept under your desk. It uses buttons rather than knobs, so adjusting the volume level is tedious. An additional button switches between 5.1 surround sound and the stereo input. These are the only surround speakers in the group that can't be wall mounted.

When using the surround-sound inputs, the subwoofer reproduces only sounds sent to the subwoofer input. As a result, you'll need a sound card that supports bass redirection to achieve anything better than hopelessly tinny sound quality. At least the auxiliary input is fed to the satellites and subwoofer in the normal way. Even with bass redirection enabled, the sound quality fails to impress, with distorted bass and overly aggressive high frequencies that made music sound fizzy and unpleasant.

SURROUND SPEAKERS 5.1, 30W power, 3x stereo phono (5.1), stereo phono inputs

PART CODE SW-HF5.1 1200/UK/Maple

SUPPLIER www.pcgd.co.uk

DETAILS www.geniusnet.com

- ✓ Inexpensive
- ✗ Dubious sound quality; needs bass redirection

HERCULES XPS 5.1 70

★★★★★
£54 inc VAT



Hercules' XPS 5.1 70 has a silvery plastic finish that looks a little tacky. At least the low-profile centre speaker fits neatly under a monitor. A solitary bass knob on the back of the subwoofer is the only means of tone control, while a volume knob and headphone socket are integrated into the right satellite.

With a cable plugged into the front input only, the speakers upmix the stereo source to feed all five satellite speakers. The set doesn't seem to use any digital processing to create virtual surround sound, though. Nonetheless, music sounded excellent in this mode, especially with the volume turned up. With the speakers wired for true surround sound, music sounded less impressive. This is not just because the surround effect was lost, but also because the bass isn't as powerful.

The sound quality is above average, but a little harsh. Logitech's cheaper X-540 set gives more warmth and sense of space.

SURROUND SPEAKERS 5.1, 70W power, 3x 3.5mm stereo (5.1) inputs

PART CODE XPS5.170

SUPPLIER www.gameseek.co.uk

DETAILS www.hercules.com

- ✓ Powerful subwoofer
- ✗ Slightly harsh tone; lacking in warmth

LOGITECH X-540

★★★★★
£50 inc VAT



The X-540's price isn't as aggressively low as Logitech's stereo X-230 set, but the sound quality is even better. There's a sense of clarity and depth to music that we rarely hear from low-cost speakers. Stereo sources seem to fill the room, especially when you activate the Matrix button on the wired remote control. This turns on an upmix function that uses digital signal processing to create virtual surround sound. Purists might find this odd, but it's very effective, producing a pleasant ambient effect in the rear speakers.

True surround sources such as DVDs and games benefited just as much from the exceptionally clear and rich sound quality. It was only at high volumes that more expensive systems such as Creative's GigaWorks G550W or Bose's Companion 3 showed their superiority, producing a more focused sound with punchier bass. With none of the cabling problems suffered by the X-230 set, there is very little not to love about this system.

SURROUND SPEAKERS 5.1, 71W power, 3x 3.5mm stereo (5.1) inputs

PART CODE 970223-0120

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com

DETAILS www.logitech.com

- ✓ Exceptional sound quality for the price
- ✗ No auxiliary input

TRUST SP-6250Z

★★★
£27 inc VAT



Surround speaker systems don't get much more affordable than the SP-6250Z. The satellites look basic, but the subwoofer's array of blue LEDs around the controls lend a touch of class. This isn't the ideal location for these controls, though, as it's likely to be kept under your desk.

Trust's SP-6250Z set produced the worst sound quality of the surround-sound systems, mainly because its subwoofer is woefully underpowered. The speakers sound thin and weak, even with the bass level at maximum, and the maximum volume you can get before distortion appears is pretty feeble. As with Genius's SW-HF5.1 1200 set, you need a sound card with bass redirection to get a decent level of bass from this set.

These speakers produce better sound than the sub-£20 stereo systems, so getting surround sound for just £27 may seem a reasonable deal. The audio quality is basic, though. If your budget doesn't reach above £30, we recommend a good stereo set instead.

SURROUND SPEAKERS 5.1, 50W power, proprietary DIN (5.1) inputs

PART CODE 15084

SUPPLIER www.eclipsecomputers.com

DETAILS www.trust.com

- ✓ Very inexpensive
- ✗ Underpowered; needs bass redirection

STEREO SPEAKERS



MANUFACTURER	ALTEC LANSING	BOSE	BOSE	CREATIVE	CYBER ACOUSTICS	CYBER ACOUSTICS
Model	FX4021	Companion 2 Mk II	Companion 3 Mk II	I-Trigue 3220	CA-2014	CA-3550
Rating	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★	★
Speaker configuration	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.1
RMS power output	46W	Not stated	Not stated	39W	1.5W	32W
Analogue inputs	2x 3.5mm stereo	2x stereo phono	2x 3.5mm stereo	3.5mm stereo	3.5mm stereo cable	3.5mm stereo
Digital inputs	None	None	None	None	None	None
Dock	None	None	None	None	None	None
Headphone output	3.5mm	3.5mm	3.5mm	3.5mm	3.5mm	3.5mm
Satellite cable lengths	2m left, 2m right	1.8m between satellites	1.7m left, 1.7m right	2m left, 2m right	1.2m between satellites, 1.1m to PC	2.35m left, 2.25m right
Cable type	Captive	Captive	Captive	Captive	Captive	Captive
Controls location	Wired remote, infra-red remote	Right satellite	Volume on wired remote, bass on subwoofer	Wired remote	Right satellite	Right satellite
Digital processing	Stereo enhancer, loudness enhancer	None	None	None	None	None
Tone controls	Bass and treble	None	Bass	Bass	None	Bass
Price inc VAT	£81	£100	£199	£38	£9	£38
Supplier	www.dabs.com	www.microanvika.com	www.johnlewis.com	www.dolphinmusic.co.uk	www.microdirect.co.uk	www.scan.co.uk
Details	www.alteclansing.co.uk	www.bose.co.uk	www.bose.co.uk	http://uk.europe.creative.com	www.cyberacoustics.com	www.cyberacoustics.com
Part code	021986942726	BOS19315	83870584	51MF0300AA001	CA2014	CA3550

STEREO SPEAKERS



MANUFACTURER	CYBER ACOUSTICS	GENIUS	GENIUS	LOGITECH	TRUST	TRUST
Model	CA-3001	SP-E350	SW-Flat2.1 850	X-230	SP-2650D	SP-3800D
Rating	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★
Speaker configuration	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.1
RMS power output	5W	10W	20W	32W	8W	45W
Analogue inputs	3.5mm stereo	3.5mm stereo cable	2x 3.5mm stereo	3.5mm stereo cable	3.5mm stereo cable	3.5mm stereo, stereo phono
Digital inputs	None	None	None	None	None	None
Dock	None	None	None	None	None	None
Headphone output	None	3.5mm	3.5mm	3.5mm	3.5mm	None
Satellite cable lengths	1.7m between satellites, 2.25m right satellite to PC, 2.1m right satellite to subwoofer	2.2m between satellites, 1.6m to PC	1.3m left, 1.3m right	1.8m between satellites, 1.7m right satellite to PC, 1.8m right satellite to subwoofer	1.5m between satellites, 1.4m to PC	1.7m left, 1.7m right
Cable type	Captive	Captive	Captive	Captive	Captive	Captive
Controls location	Right satellite	Right satellite	Subwoofer	Volume on right satellite, bass on subwoofer	Right satellite	Volume on right satellite, bass on subwoofer
Digital processing	None	Stereo enhancer	None	None	None	None
Tone controls	None	Tone	Bass	Bass	None	Bass
Price inc VAT	£16	£12	£22	£27	£15	£28
Supplier	www.microdirect.co.uk	www.pc-itsolutions.co.uk	www.microdirect.co.uk	www.amazon.co.uk	www.7dayshop.com	www.morecomputers.co.uk
Details	www.cyberacoustics.com	www.geniusnet.com	www.geniusnet.com	www.logitech.com	www.trust.com	www.trust.com
Part code	CA3001	SPGEN-SP-E350	31730349100	970123-1120	14924	14928

SURROUND-SOUND SPEAKERS



MANUFACTURER	CREATIVE	CREATIVE	GENIUS	HERCULES	LOGITECH	TRUST
Model	GigaWorks G550W	Inspire T6100	SW-HF5.1 1200	XPS 5.1 70	X-540	SP-6250Z
Rating	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★
Speaker configuration	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1
RMS power output	310W	52W	30W	70W	71W	50W
Analogue inputs	3x stereo phono (5.1)	3x 3.5mm stereo (5.1)	3x stereo phono (5.1), stereo phono	3x 3.5mm stereo (5.1)	3x 3.5mm stereo (5.1)	Proprietary DIN (5.1)
Digital inputs	None	None	None	None	None	None
Dock	None	None	None	None	None	None
Headphone output	3.5mm	3.5mm	3.5mm	3.5mm	3.5mm	None
Satellite cable lengths	3m (wireless to rear speaker amplifier)	1.7m left, 1.7m centre, 1.7m right, 4.1m rear, 1.7m to PC	2.8m front left/centre/right, 7.8m rear	1.7m left, 2.25m centre, 1.7m right, 4.5m rear	1.6m left, 2.2m centre, 1.6m right, 4.4m rear	2m left, 1.7m centre, 2m right, 6m rear
Cable type	Replaceable	Captive	Captive	Captive	Captive	Captive
Controls location	Wired remote, infra-red remote	Volume on right satellite, bass on subwoofer	Subwoofer	Volume on right satellite, bass on subwoofer	Wired remote	Subwoofer
Digital processing	None	None	None	None	Surround upmixing	None
Tone controls	Bass and treble	Bass	Bass	Bass	Bass	Bass
Price inc VAT	£196	£35	£36	£54	£50	£27
Supplier	www.dolphinmusic.co.uk	www.amazon.co.uk	www.pcgd.co.uk	www.gameseek.co.uk	www.dabs.com	www.eclipsecomputers.com
Details	http://uk.europe.creative.com	http://uk.europe.creative.com	www.geniusnet.com	www.hercules.com	www.logitech.com	www.trust.com
Part code	51MF4080AA003	51MF4085AA001	SW-HF5.1 1200/UK/Mapie	XP55.170	970223-0120	15084

Labs verdict

Speakers

None of the stereo speaker sets without a subwoofer performed well. Genius's SP-E350 sounds acceptable, but it's almost ridiculously ugly. Bose's Companion 2 Mk II sounds excellent but, at £100, it's very expensive. Creative's GigaWorks T20, which we reviewed a year ago (*Labs, Shopper* April 2006), is a better bet than either set and costs around £60.

If you can find room for a subwoofer, you'll get a much better deal. Logitech's X-230 set produces superb sound and at £27 including VAT it's a bargain, and our Budget Buy. You'll need to be fussy to find fault with its output, but if you are, Altec Lansing's FX4021 set is worth the extra expense. It's our Best Buy.

If you want to immerse yourself in surround sound, two sets stand out. Logitech's X-540 set sounds great and at £50 including VAT it's fantastic value, too. It wins our Best Buy award. If you want your neighbours to enjoy your music as much as you do, Creative's GigaWorks G550W sounds great when turned up loud and its wireless rear speaker system works well. If you don't want or need the wireless system, the GigaWorks G500 sounds just as good and is cheaper.

STEREO

ALTEC LANSING

FX4021

★★★★★



LOGITECH

X-230

★★★★★



SURROUND SOUND

LOGITECH

X-540

★★★★★

